



The Ranger Review

Montezuma Castle, Montezuma Well, & Tuzigoot National Monuments

Little House in the Verde Valley

By Archeologist Technician Melissa Philibeck

Walk along the path at Montezuma Well National Monument and you will be face to face with prehistoric Native American dwellings and a way of life that has been long forgotten. Many stories are held within the cliff dwellings, cave dwellings, and pueblo ruins that only our imaginations are able to tell. But one story that doesn't receive much attention is the Back Family story.

According to "A History of Montezuma Well" written by a long time volunteer Jack Beckman; William Beriman Back was born in 1858 in Harrisonville, Missouri and moved to the area in 1887. It was here that he raised cattle on the nearby Beaver Creek Ranch and in 1888 he acquired the Well property from Abraham Lincoln Smith for the price of two horses!

Not long after, William B. Back married Margie Ann Dickinson and had a family of seven children. In addition to raising sheep, cattle, and horses, he also sold hay and grain to local settlers and used the waters of Beaver Creek and Montezuma Well to grow water-melons and cantaloupe. He would load up his wagon with all of his goods to sell and travel to foot of Schnebly Hill along with other farmers of the valley and double up their teams of horses to pull each wagon up the steepest part on the way to Flagstaff. Once in Flagstaff, Back would sell his goods to the lumber camps and railroad workers. He would also board the horses and mules from the Grand Canyon and camps for the winter. Along with providing goods to the lumber and railway workers, Back would treat visitors to Montezuma Well with boat rides for 25 cents a ride.

Even though the prehistoric occupants of the Well have long come and gone, they still influenced some of the structures that were built. A blacksmith shop was built in a Sinaguan cave behind Back's house. Another cave was used as a pig pen using the rocks from the Sinaguan structures to build a wall. The Sinaguan influence did not stop there! Back's children,

nephews, and nieces would show visitors around the Well and would utilize the high amounts of calcium carbonate in the irrigation canal to create their own "artifacts". The children would leave old horseshoes in the ditch until they were coated with lime and sell them as "petrified horseshoes"! While the pigpen and some of the other structures that William B. Back built have succumbed to the hands of time, one of the structures still stands near the old family home: a one room smokehouse. Today, National Park Service Archeologist Matt Guebard takes as much time preserving the Back's family history as he does with the prehistoric history at Montezuma Well. The rusty old hinges still cling to the door, and the beams of the small wooden structure are stained with the residue left behind by many a day and night of smoking meat to be shared with family and friends.

Our Past is something not to be forgotten nor denied. It is the thing that drives us to visit our nation's historic places. It gives meaning to the stories that are held within the walls and keeps us coming back for more. Montezuma Well holds so many stories from the past and one of them is kept safely for future generations in a little house in the Verde Valley.



Historic photo of William B. Back on his front porch at Montezuma Well. Photo by NPS Archive.

Sweatin’ like a Cicada?

By Lead Visitor Use Assistant Penny Wagner

Growing up in the high desert of Arizona, the shrill love song of the cicada marks the commencement of summertime. Today, as a Park Ranger, I identify this loud buzzing sound for curious visitors from all over the world here at the National Monuments of the Verde Valley. As a resident of central Arizona, you expect the heat, the humidity, and the afternoon rain showers as staples of the summer monsoon season– and the cicadas provide your soundtrack.

Cicadas are insects and they lay their eggs in tree branches. When the eggs hatch, the young cicada falls to the ground and burrows into the soil where it feeds off the nutrients they suck from the roots of plants. Juvenile cicadas stay underground for 2 to 17 years depending on the species. If you live back East, you are probably more familiar with periodical cicadas that take 13 to 17 years to emerge. A cicada comes out of the ground as nymphs, crawls up a nearby tree, digs in its claws, splits open the back of its exoskeleton and flies away!



An Apache Cicada sitting on a tree branch. Image courtesy of DesertUSA.com

bale to sweat is a very important component of regulating your body temperature. But did you know there is an insect in the desert that has evolved this adaptation to the heat? You guessed it– our cicadas sweat too!

Desert species of the cicada can release moisture creating an evaporative cooling effect. This allows the male cicada to stay cool while it sings during the hottest times of the day when most predators are avoiding the heat. In addition, the male cicada is definitely one of the loudest insects on the planet. Males create this ear-splitting racket by flexing their tymbal, a drum-like organ found in their abdomen. The cicada’s shrill scream discourages birds while hopefully attracting a mate at the same time.

When male cicadas sing the females react, the mating process begins, and the end of the cicada’s life draws near. So, if you ever wondered what that deafening buzzzzzzzzzzzing sound in the desert heat was, now you know it was a sweatin’ cicada searching for a mate and singin’ his heart out!

Now there is one thing that everyone seems to have in common in the summer in Arizona and that is....sweat! In fact, being



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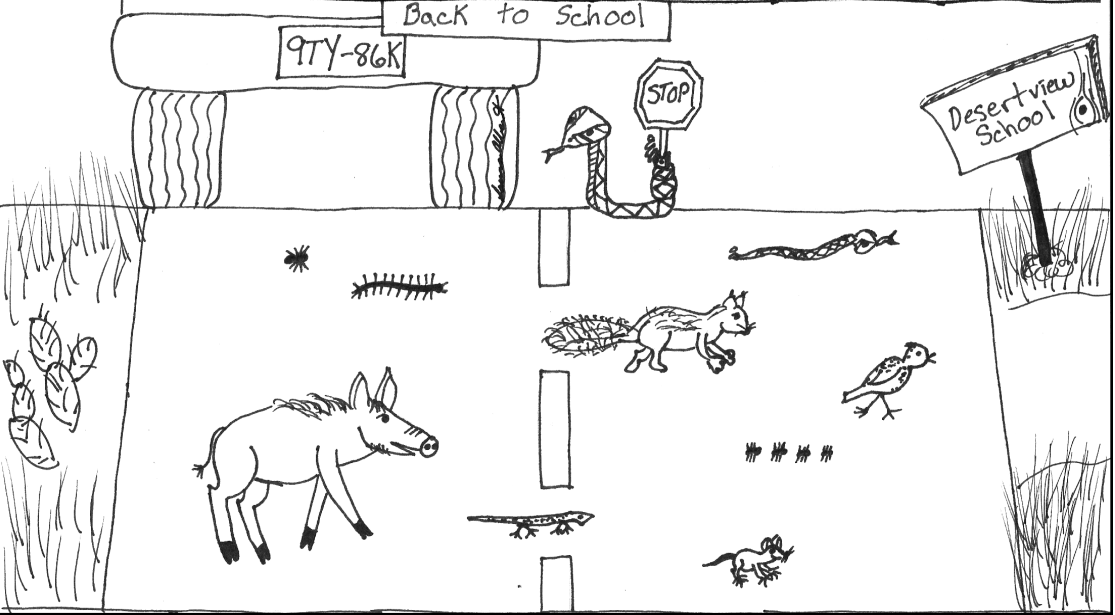
By Ranger Laura Albert

The Ranger Review is designed to give you more information about what to see and do while visiting our sites. We hope that you enjoy seeing our parks from a Ranger’s point of view!

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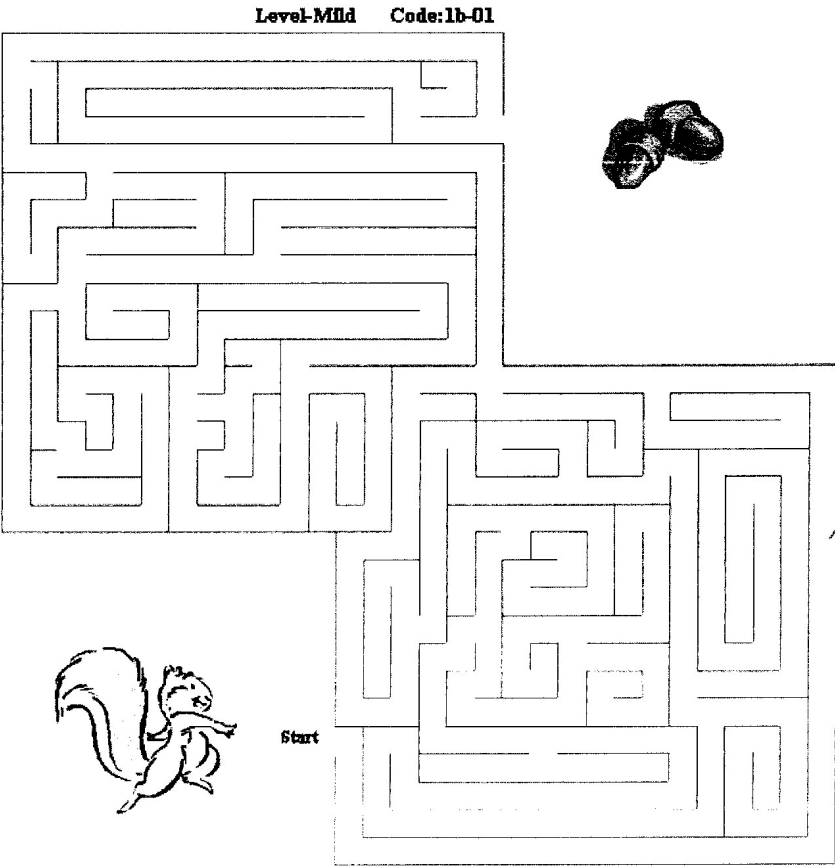
Adventures of a Red-Head: Blondie the Fox in the Verde Valley



Jr. Ranger Page

Help the Wildlife

Help the squirrel find his way through the maze to get to his food on the opposite side!



View Through the Lens

Upcoming Events:

August 15-28, 2010

No Major Events at this time. Enjoy the monsoon rains!



A Tarantula Hawk (*Pepsis formosa*) pulling her prey to a secluded hole in order to lay her egg. Photo by Gregg Webb.

Did you know?



Female Tarantula Hawk dragging her prey away. Photo by Gregg Webb.

The Tarantula Hawk (*Pepsis formosa* & *Pepsis thisbe*) is a large spider wasp with black or blue/black bodies and redish to orange wings. Though they are classified as a spider wasp, it is only in the larval stage that they eat spiders. Tarantulas to be exact! The females hunt these large, harmless spiders and their sting paralyzes the spider so that it cannot defend itself while it is being eaten alive by the larvae. So though Tarantulas look scary, there are things that even *they* are afraid of!